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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000295

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH FM GUL'S VISIT TO ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

(U) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Turkish and Israeli contacts in Ankara portray FM Gul's January 3-5 visit to Israel and Palestine as giving mixed results: signaling the end of 2004's Turkish-Israeli public tensions (both Turkish and Israeli interlocutors affirm that deeper, long-standing security and intel cooperation has remained essentially steady), but pointing up the gap between the GOT's conception of itself as a serious player in the MEPP or Middle East in general and the reality. Although Turkey views itself a possible mediator between Israel and the Arabs, neither the Turks, Israelis nor Palestinians made any concrete proposals for Turkish mediation. End summary.

2. (C) This cable is based on readouts from Turkish MFA DDG Gokturk, Israel/Palestine Desk Officer Sakar, Israeli DCM Nahshon, Israeli First Secretary Bar-li Sa'ar, MFA Coordinator for Palestine Dincerler, "Sabah" Ankara bureau chief Aydintasbas, and Turkish national security analyst Faruk Demir.

Both Sides Try to Put Tensions Behind

3. (C) Turkish and Israeli diplomatic interlocutors aver that Turkey and Israel are using Gul's visit to try to put behind them the public bilateral tension stemming from PM Erdogan's sharp criticism of Israeli targeted assassinations. MFA Office Director Sakar said the visit illustrates that "we are over these problems." Israeli DCM Nahshon said that, Israel is casting the visit as a success because it will have a positive effect on the Turkish public's perception of relations and because it will set up a much more significant visit by Erdogan, which the Israeli Embassy sees as exponentially more important and as occurring some time in Spring 2005. Likewise, although the visit produced no new agreements or initiatives, Bar-li Sa'ar assessed it as important just because it happened and cast it as opening a "new page" in bilateral relations. Sakar, Nahshon and Bar-li Sa'ar all affirmed that neither Gul nor any of his Israeli interlocutors raised last year's tensions during the visit. According to Sakar, the "tough points" were discussed during Israeli Foreign Ministry DirGen Prosor's November 2004 visit to Turkey. The Israelis reiterated their desire for PM Erdogan to visit Israel.

4. (C) Nahshon and Bar-li Sa'ar both said the Gul-Sharon meeting had "good chemistry" (although Nahshon acknowledged that neither Sharon nor Gul was fooled into thinking the other holds warm feelings); the meeting lasted 90 minutes instead of the planned 45, with Sharon canceling other appointments in order to spend more time with Gul. Bar-li Sh'ar claimed the atmospherics of Gul's meetings with DPM Olmert and Labor Party leader Peres were also good; Nahshon and Bar-li Sa'ar said the meeting between Gul and FM Shalom was cooler.

No Proposals for Turkish Mediation

5. (C) Turkey views itself as a possible mediator between Israel and the Arabs, and the Turkish media portrayed Gul's visit as a step in that direction, although neither of our MFA interlocutors was able to clarify how. Moreover, both Nahshon and Bar-li Sa'ar told us Gul came with no concrete proposals for mediation. Sakar said Gul's Israeli interlocutors asked him to give the Palestinians a generic message to end terror, although Gul told the Israelis that Abu Mazen may not be influential with all Palestinian groups.

6. (C) Regarding Syria, Sakar said Gul told the Israelis Turkey would like to be helpful "when the time comes." Nahshon dismissed the significance of this Turkish offer, saying that Israel's priority is dealing with the Palestinians. Moreover, he said, the Israelis used the Gul visit to test the sincerity and capability of the Turks, and found Gul wanting in both regards. Shalom deliberately used his joint press conference with Gul publicly to note that Israel had asked Erdogan to use his December visit to Syria to raise the case of repatriation of the remains of executed

Israeli spy Eli Cohen from Syria and had asked Gul to raise the case of another disappeared Israeli. Davutoglu's subsequent complaint that Turkey had been on the verge of a breakthrough with Syria regarding Cohen's remains but that Shalom's statement had blown the whole deal reflected Davutoglu's and Turkey's lack of seriousness and weight, Nahshon said. Nahshon also relished noting that an Israeli journalist had trapped Gul by asking whether Syria's renunciation of its claim to Hatay set a precedent to renounce its claim to the Golan Heights; Gul was thrown into confusion, Nahshon remarked.

17. (C) Gul's Israeli interlocutors urged Turkish contributions to Gaza's humanitarian, infrastructure, education and public health needs, as well as hosting Israeli/Palestinian people-to-people contacts, Bar-li Sa'ar said. She characterized Gul as "not satisfied" with these ideas; he counter-proposed a Turkish peacekeeping role in Gaza. Assessing the visit from a (dismissive) Egyptian perspective, Egyptian Embassy counselor Moucharafa noted to us dryly that the Turks do not know what they are letting themselves in for if they think they can tackle peacekeeping in the deeply radicalized Gaza.

18. (C) Gul offered (amid much fanfare, according to Bar-li Sa'ar; "Sabah" bureau chief Aydintasbas described it as much self-important scurrying too and fro) a Turkish donation of 25,000 uniforms to the Palestinian police. Claiming that the offer is an important one because it will cost the Turks \$3.2 million, Dincerler said the idea is to help mold the police into one professional unit instead of several units with diverse loyalties. Saying the idea reflected a paltry nature of Turkish initiatives, Nahshon thought it doubtful the Palestinians will bother to wear the uniforms. The GOT also reiterated a previous proposal to donate \$900,000 for school and hospital projects in Palestinian territory.

19. (C) Despite the overall good will, there were some awkward moments, Nahshon said. Gul refused to wear a yarmulke during a tour of the Holocaust Memorial; Bar'li Sa'ar said the Turkish MPs accompanying Gul did not understand what the memorial was dedicated to. The Turkish press reported Gul refused to have an Israeli flag on the car in which he rode to the Dome of the Rock; Nahshon noted that this contretemps made Gul 20 minutes late for his appointment with the Israeli President.

110. (C) According to Bar-li Sa'ar, the two sides did not discuss the long mooted, long delayed project to ship water from Turkey's Manavgat River to Israel; when prodded, Gokturk acknowledged that, in any event, the Israelis continue to drag their feet.

Talks in Palestine -----

111. (C) Dincerler said the Palestinians told Gul they welcome good Turkish relations with Israel as an asset for Palestine. However, neither side proposed any concrete way in which Turkey could mediate between Israel and Palestine.

112. (C) According to Gokturk and Sakar, Gul raised the need to stop terrorism with Palestinian PM Qurei, specifically mentioning suicide bombings and artillery and missile attacks. Sakar said that Qurei took Gul's point and promised serious steps on security and reforms to Palestinian security services. Dincerler said Gul did not raise this point with Abu Mazen. Dincerler said one Palestinian official (whom he did not identify) downplayed the seriousness of Kassem missile attacks, saying the missiles are too primitive to represent a real danger. Gul also stressed the need for good governance, transparency and democracy, according to Dincerler.

113. (C) Dincerler and Aydintasbas separately described efforts by Gul and Davutoglu to put a positive spin on Turkish efforts to contribute to the Palestinian election process, a spin which their Palestinian interlocutors did not fully accept. As Gul and Davutoglu tried to present it, the Palestinians complained to Gul that Israeli police would escort Palestinian ballot boxes from Jerusalem to counting stations in Palestinian territory. Gul and Davutoglu asserted that by passing this concern to the Israelis, they were able to secure Israeli agreement not to escort (Bar-li Sa'ar said the call from the Turks was the first time Israel heard this complaint). In his January 10 meeting with Codel Kyl, FM Gul cited this as a small example of how Turkey might be helpful between the two sides. In fact, Aydintasbas said, the Palestinian Authority wanted Israeli escorts to ensure that rival Palestinian groups would not be able to tamper with the ballot boxes, and in the end it was the Americans who worked out arrangements satisfactory to both sides.

114. (C) Comment: While Tel Aviv and Ankara, each for its own reasons, want to restore a harmonious public face to bilateral relations, challenges remain. Sakar predicted

Turkey will continue to speak out about Israeli actions with which it disagrees. Erdogan's ruling AK party and the party's grass roots include significant segments of people who express anti-Jewish sentiments and Turkish popular opinion in general remains anti-Israel. Moreover a research assistant at a Turkish think-tank, one of the few Turkish analysts who speaks fluent Hebrew, found in her survey of Israeli contacts from official and think-tank circles that Gul left a singularly dull impression.

15. (C) Yet both sides want to portray the Gul visit as a positive step. For the Israelis, according to Nahshon, the immediate goal is to build on Gul's visit to secure an Erdogan visit. For the GOT, the visit is proof that Turkey can play a significant mediating role. Turkey's desire for a mediation role is unrealistic, however. The Turks underestimate resentment toward them in the Arab world stemming from the Ottoman occupation of Arab land, and people like Gul are blind to the dismissive nature of the flattery that the Arab world uses to string them along. As Aydinbas recounted from the Jan. 6 Iraq neighbors' meeting in Amman, the irony in the Egyptian FonMin's remark that Turkey is so fortunate to be trying to play an active role because it is such a great nation went completely over Gul's head.

End comment.

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